Appendix VI

Bromont Capital Partners; Congo (2011-2014); Kinshasa (2012-2014)

BROMONT CAPITAL PARTNERS; RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO

In an attempt to find a new source of income, in October 2011 I formed a new company, Bromont Capital Partners, along with Jeremy Jonas (the son of Holly Higgins Jonas and her husband, McGill professor John Jonas) and the brilliant young Kurtis Rive (whose grandfather Lloyd Boivin lived in Knowlton). Over the next several months, Jeremy and I examined a number of possible ventures during many sessions at his house at 349 Kensington Avenue in Westmount (an auspicious address, I thought, as it was the same street number as my own house on Lakeside in Knowlton).

Jeremy and I looked into a large number of potential opportunities, finding nothing suitable. One of the more promising prospects arose from Jeremy's friendship with a Chinese businessman, known in Canada as Will Sheng, who had studied metallurgy at McGill under Jeremy's father. Although I made several exploratory trips to Beijing to investigate the manufacture of solar panels, nothing came of the relationship except that Will Sheng later became an investor in a project in the Congo, described below. However, over lunch with Will at the University Club of Toronto, I did have the pleasure of meeting the great Dashan, one of China's most famous television personalities who is actually Mark Rowswell from Ottawa. Mark's brother Ben Rowswell was Canada's ambassador to Venezuela from 2014 to 2017, and was later president of the Canadian International Council. In Beijing I also had an enjoyable meeting with Mark MacKinnon, a very perceptive and experienced journalist who at the time was China correspondent for the *Globe and Mail.* As a final indulgence at the end of my last Beijing trip, I had a superb (and expensive) dinner at the luxurious *Maison Boulud*, with its three Michelin stars, housed in the grand old American Legation Quarters near Tiananmen Square. The restaurant has since closed.[1]

Back in Montreal, I was finally persuaded by a dubious Québécois character called Joseph "Jos" Dessureault that it might be worth my while to investigate the possibilities of diamond mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly the Belgian Congo, then the DRC, then Zaïre, and then the Democratic Republic of Congo again).

According to the impressive CV he gave me, Jos Dessureault was born in Bouchette, Quebec in 1950, and had a BA in international law. He had been an assistant to two Liberal ministers, Gérard Pelletier and Bob Andras, and public relations director for Steinberg's. After 1980 he had acquired extensive experience in the mining industry in several countries. From 2004 to 2011 he had lived and worked in the DRC as a developer of diamond and gold properties,

[1] See: https://worldcrunch.com/business-finance/why-a-three-star-michelin-restaurant-failed-in-beijing

where he had acquired a Congolese wife after divorcing his Canadian wife. What he didn't tell me was that he was an alcoholic.

I had asked Dessureault for a list of references, and among them was Nick Davenport, an urbane Englishman who had been the long-time head of all De Beers' operations in the Congo. I made contact with Davenport, who although retired, still spent half the year with his French wife at his beautiful villa in Kinshasa and the other half in Portugal. He was non-committal about Dessureault, but agreed to see me in Kinshasa.

In mid-summer 2012 I flew to Kinshasa[2] via Brussels Airlines, and with Davenport's help was eventually able to find myself a large apartment on the 22nd floor of the *Galéries Présidentelles* on the Grand Boulevard, not far from the Hotel Memling where I did my banking at the Belgian-owned Trust Merchant Bank. Davenport said it was the very apartment that he had used for his office for many years. It had four bedrooms, of which I could let out three to employees of various UN agencies. It also had a glorious view across the mighty Congo River to the city of Brazzaville on the other side, capital of the Republic of Congo (formerly French), where Charles de Gaulle had his headquarters during part of World War II. Kinshasa and Brazzaville are the two national capitals that are closest to one another in the world, although the only transportation link between them is a small *"canot rapide*", not for the faint of heart.

Nick Davenport also introduced me to Ingénieur Joseph Ntumba Tshimbila, his highly recommended friend and former government official, now in private business, and Papa[3] Ntumba's son Christian Mutoke, who became my business partners in the DRC. Nick and his wife also invited me on a cruise one day up the Congo River on their powerful speedboat for a swim, during which I had a delightful time floating down the warm, wide and slow-moving river on my back, bumping from one sandbar to another, with not another soul in sight.

It also turned out that I knew Canada's ambassador to the DRC, Jean-Carol Pelletier, who had worked with me in Ottawa in the Mulroney period. Jean-Carol had a large house in a quiet neighbourhood of Kinshasa, although he had once had to barricade himself there during some demonstrations. He also had an excellent chef, and we had several pleasant dinners together. (A previous Canadian ambassador in Kinshasa, from 1978-81, had been Raymond Chrétien, later our ambassador in Washington.)

In the end, this was the only project undertaken by Bromont Capital Partners. Jeremy Jonas moved on to other business activities in Montreal, and Kurtis Rive moved to Toronto, where he worked for Pierre Cros, the husband of Conrad Black's daughter Alana, who owns a number of bars and restaurants in Europe and New York. I invested some money with two Kinshasa-based diamond traders, Gabriel Osombo and Christian Mutoke, but the results have been uneven. There is still a small income stream from these investments, characterized as a return of capital.

[2] Kinshasa, formerly Léopoldville, is now the largest French-speaking city in the world, with a 2018 population of 13,251,000. Metropolitan Paris is second at 12,568,000, and then metropolitan Montreal at 4,100,000.
[3] "Papa" is a widely-used title of respect throughout the Congo. Occasionally I was "Papa Leblanc".

The venture in which Will Sheng and I later invested involved financing an upriver voyage of a small cargo ship. Will Sheng came to Kinshasa, and we did proper due diligence together. We entrusted the project to Olivier Burn, the son of an American entrepreneur and contractor in Kinshasa, Cameron Burn, and his Congolese wife Chantal. Olivier was brought up in Kinshasa, and spoke two or three of the local languages. The plan was to load the ship with all kinds of merchandise to be sold to various upriver communities, then fill the hold with corn for the return voyage to Kinshasa. Our financial analysis looked promising.

The first voyage was successful, resulting in a profit of $22,000 US to be split equally between Will Sheng and me. I paid Will his share, and we decided to reinvest most of the funds in a second voyage. This time we were not so lucky. Homeward bound, the ship ran aground on one of the many shifting sandbars in the Congo River, and the entire cargo was lost. Since we had neglected to ask Lloyd's of London for insurance, we experienced the disappointment of many anxious merchants throughout the ages, waiting in vain for their ship to come in.

My few other business activities since 2010 were to serve for a couple of years on the advisory board of Tremcar Inc., a large and successful family-owned manufacturer of tanker trailers for the North American market, based in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Quebec. Also, after an introduction by my cousin John Budden, a financial analyst, I was briefly a director of Beaufield Resources Inc. of Ottawa, a junior mining company headed by successful Danish-Canadian entrepreneur and geophysicist Jens Hansen.

But even though I had done nothing wrong at Hollinger Inc, the Ontario Securities Commission decreed that I was not fit to continue as a director of any Canadian public company, owing to my having been removed by Gordon Walker, with the permission of the court, from the board of Hollinger Inc.[4] Jens himself resigned as CEO in 2017, and Beaufield was acquired by Okisko Mining in 2018. Finally, at the invitation of Mario Bertrand, who had been Premier Robert Bourassa's principal advisor when I was in the PMO, in 2014 I did some consulting with Montreal construction company Hexagone Inc. The CEO was Joël Gauthier, former director general of the Quebec Liberal Party, who was subsequently in June 2015 charged with fraud by Quebec's securities regulator, amid allegations that he had been funded by convicted criminal Tony Accurso.

Although my African adventures cannot be qualified as a great financial success, I have absolutely no regrets about them. Apart from a one-week visit to South Africa on a briefing tour with the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, I had never visited that vast and diverse continent. Altogether I made ten trips to Kinshasa over two years, from July 2012 to October 2014, for a total of 157 days.

I learned a great deal about life in French-speaking west Africa. I met many fascinating people, and made a couple of good friends. The only problem I ever had was stupidly leaving my cell phone visible in the breast pocket of my shirt while walking on the street in Kinshasa, where a young *voyou g*rabbed it and ran. I did narrowly avoid a few shakedowns on Kinshasa streets by

[4] https://www.benzinga.com/pressreleases/11/10/m1979346/beaufield-resources-resignation-of-director-and-corporate-update

the local police, military or militias, but each time a Congolese companion came to my rescue and talked our way out of trouble.

Like all African countries, and many others elsewhere, the Democratic Republic of Congo (population 84 million) has a tiny minority of people who are extremely rich, own houses in Europe or North America, and travel the world. But over 99 percent of the inhabitants are poor, many living at barely subsistence level. There is a small middle class, largely connected with the government. One remnant of the long control[5] of the country by Belgium is that there are still some excellent schools, and a few decent universities, but they are generally accessible to only a privileged few in major cities.

There is also a large equally-privileged cadre of officials of a number of UN agencies, particularly the omni-present United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUSCO, an acronym based on its French name (Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo). MONUSCO is a peacekeeping force which was established by the Security Council in 1999 and 2000, to monitor the peace process after the Second Congo War (1998-2003) in which millions died, though much of its focus subsequently turned to other ongoing conflicts in the country. All the many employees of the various UN agencies have lavish tax-free salaries and expense allowances, which set them apart from the local population.

Corruption is a way of life in the Congo, both small-scale and large. The main reason why people seek government office in the DRC is to enrich themselves and their families. But things may be looking up. In June, 2020, for the first time in the history of the DRC, a leading politician, Vital Kamerhe, was convicted of embezzling more than US $48 million of public funds, and sentenced to 20 years of forced labour.[6] This occurred despite the highly suspicious death on May 26, 2020 of the judge presiding over the trial. Kamerhe's co-accused, Lebanese businessman Samih Jammal was given the same sentence. In their appeals, Jamal is being represented by a squad of international lawyers, including a leading French lawyer who defended French president Nicolas Sarkozy in one of his many legal entanglements. The Lebanese presence is everywhere in the Congo's commercial and business sector. The supermarkets and grocery stores where I did my shopping in Kinshasa are all run by Lebanese, who employ Congolese as staff.

The Congo is also a classic case of the resource curse -- the paradox that countries with an abundance of natural resources tend to have less economic growth, less democracy, and worse development outcomes than countries with fewer natural resources. The Congo has virtually every major resource, but these are exploited by foreigners in league with the very small ruling classes, with no benefit to the average citizen.

[5] For 23 years the Congo was the personal property of Leopold II, King of the Belgians, who exploited the population mercilessly, and then from 1908 to 1960 it was a Belgian colony run from Brussels. Christian de Laet, my cousin by marriage, was a Belgian who did his military service in the Congo in the 1950s.
[6] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vital_Kamerhe

The Congo has long attracted shady wheeler-dealers and adventurers. Perhaps the most glaring example is Dan Gertler, a billionaire Israeli businessman who has diamond and copper mining interests in the DRC, and has also invested in iron ore, gold, cobalt, oil, agriculture, and banking. Gertler is very close to former DRC president Joseph Kabila, who until in 2023 when he went into self-imposed exile, initially in South Africa, was a dominant political figure in the country despite being barred from the presidency by constitutional term limits. A Congolese military court tried Kabila in absentia for treason and in September 2025 sentenced him to death. Just weeks later, In October 2025, Kabila appeared at an event in Nairobi, Kenya, along with other opposition politicians, and vowed to "save" the DRC. Still relatively young (born in 1971), and backed by millions of dollars of illicit payments from China, Kabila remains a force to be reckoned with

Dan Gertler's grandfather was Moshe Schnitzer, a Romanian Jewish immigrant to Israel who became a key player in the international diamond trade, along with Gertler's brother Shmuel Schnitzer. I used to watch Gertler's private plane swoop into Kinshasa for his weekly meetings with Kabila.

According to The Economist of February 13, 2021, the current DRC president, Félix Tshisekedi, was beginning to extricate himself from Kabila's influence, which is good. But the same article makes the point that Tshisekedi had fulfilled almost none of his 2018 election promises such as free primary schools, new infrastructure and a reformed electoral system, while most Congolese remain extremely poor.

Another example of the exploitation of DRC resources by foreigners is Glencore, founded in 1974 as Marc Rich & Co. AG by billionaire commodity trader Marc Rich. Glencore is an abbreviation of "Global Energy Commodity Resources". Rich was charged in the US with tax evasion and illegal business dealings with Iran, but was pardoned by President Bill Clinton in January 2001 on his last day in office. Until 2021, Glencore's chief executive was Ivan Glasenberg, who has had an up and down relationship with Dan Gertler. The story of Messrs Glasenberg's and Gertler's unscrupulous activities in the Congo is more fully described in Appendix VII.

DIAMOND HUNTING

Jos Dessureault introduced me to many of his Congolese friends. On my first visit to Kinshasa I stayed with him in an apartment he had rented at my expense. He took pains to impress me by meeting me in person at the airport with a car and driver, and whisking me through the usually laborious customs and immigration bureaucracy as if I were a VIP. A daily stream of Congolese visitors then began arriving at the apartment, to whom Jos would provide liberal portions of Scotch, and on their departure a few hundred Congolese francs each for "expenses" (otherwise *frais de motivation*, or *boisson sèche*). It soon became apparent that although a good time was being had by all with my money, little progress was being made on the business front. My concerns increased when Jos took to inviting gorgeous Congolese girls to spend the night with him. I declined his invitations to do likewise.

Our relationship deteriorated over the ensuing 18 months. The final rupture came when Jos arranged for his accomplices to "neglect" to return to me a second-hand Nissan jeep I had bought, despite my supplications and eventual threats. I finally arranged to recover it in the dead of night, charged Jos with theft, and he spent a night in jail. The next day he swore he would have me killed. We have not spoken since.

At a political event in Drummondville, Quebec in 2012 for the *Action Démocratique du Québec,* a short-lived Quebec political party led by Mario Dumont, I had met a young conservative activist from Joliette by the name of Mikey Colangelo Lauzon. He asked me what I did, and when I told him about the Congo he asked if he might accompany me on my next trip at his own expense, with a view to becoming an investor. Such is the lure of the dark continent.

Here is a report that I wrote about a memorable diamond reconnaissance trip to the Congo interior in January, 2013, in the company of Mikey and several Congolese "businessmen".

GETTING FROM KINSHASA TO KANANGA AND TSHIKAPA

We left Kinshasa-Ndjili airport at 9 a.m. Monday morning January 14, 2013, a party of six: my two Congolese partners in our new company Tumupe Mining sarl (*société à responsabilité limitée)* Joseph Ntumba and his son Christian Mutoke; Jean Kamba Kabula (Kinshasa representative of his elder brother Zorro); Tutulosa ("*Cent-dix* or 110" -- elder brother of *chef coûtumier* Simon Kamwanga, so-called because he claimed to be 110 percent better than anybody else); Mikey Colangelo Lauzon of Joliette, Quebec (an investor); and me.

Because of various conflicting social engagements, we had not checked in at the downtown office of Air Kasai/*Compagnie Africaine d'Aviation* (CAA) on Sunday as is the usual practice, so on Monday morning we had to check in at the airport itself. A chaotic bedlam. I actually had to cover my ears because of the constant and theatrical full-throttle shouting that is normal conversation here in public places. Thanks to some personal contacts of our Congolese companions, we eventually sorted everything out.

One hilarious note: various officious officials insisted on meticulously weighing each piece of cabin baggage so they could tag it as not exceeding 5 kilos. When one of our bags was over 5 kilos, they said no problem – just take some heavy items out of the bag until its weight falls below 5 kilos, we will weigh it and tag it, and then you just put the heavy items back in again afterwards. There was also a "Tape Nazi", whose self-appointed mission in life was to wrap as much packing tape as possible around every piece of checked baggage, for no apparent reason. One passenger checked two large tires, and the Tape Nazi spent about 15 minutes wrapping tape around each tire until no rubber could be seen at all.

Our first leg was to Kananga, capital of Kasai Occidental, on CAA's one and only Airbus 320-200, six seats per row with a central aisle, economy class only, every seat taken, 180 passengers. (Air Canada uses a less dense configuration on its Airbuses.) Service was good, almost to European standards. Time of flight one hour and twenty minutes, with a one-hour time change as we were flying almost due east.

At Kananga airport we had to show our passports, as if at immigration into a new country, and after a short stop-over we boarded an elderly Fokker 50 twin-engine turboprop for the short hop to Tshikapa (about thirty minutes). Again a full flight of 62 passengers, service markedly less impressive.

After a soft landing at Tshikapa airport (really a red-dirt airstrip with a few random buildings, and subject to rain erosion), we again had to show all our papers, including our official letters of invitation to visit two mining sites. After a brief wait for some checked luggage (not mine), we were treated to our first motor-scooter or small motor-bike ride. A platoon of "*motos*" materialized and we each climbed on behind a young driver. For Mikey and me, it was our first taste of local roads -- more like rutted, eroded, bumpy, pot-holed dirt paths – and we quickly learned how to hang on tight to any available hand-hold.

The *motos* deposited us at the Hôtel Paradis – a grand misnomer if ever there was one – on a side street near the centre of Tshikapa. Our rooms were poorly lighted by a single overhead bulb, but they at least had a toilet and shower *en suite*, although my shower didn't work. By this time it was about 2 p.m., and I expected some sort of business inspection or discussion, but instead we were taken on a walking tour of Tshikapa for an hour or so.

Tshikapa has mushroomed in the last 25 years because of nearby diamond activity, and is full of diamond *comptoirs*, unplanned and dirty. It is at the confluence of the Tshikapa and Kasai Rivers. The Kasai is broad and impressive, the Tshikapa narrower but very fast-flowing. There is a good but overlong Youtube video of Tshikapa in 2012.[7]

Open-air vendors were selling all imaginable foods, and some I had never imagined, including termites. I didn't indulge. At one point we encountered a man with a small monkey on a leash, who was happy to let us take its picture.

There is a rickety bridge across the Tshikapa River, and we stopped in the middle of the bridge to take some pictures. We were soon approached by some local policemen who told us that this was forbidden for security reasons. Mikey and I obediently departed, but Jean Kamba stayed to remonstrate. We later found out that he had gotten himself arrested, and had had to phone his brother Zorro to arrange to be sprung. Apparently because of the rebel activity in the Goma area to the east, the government is afraid that someone may start to blow up bridges, and we were obviously casing the joint for that very purpose.

Back at the Hôtel Paradis, we had intermittent desultory chats over Cokes, and eventually it was time for dinner. All the Congolese repaired to one of their bedrooms to eat "*à la congolaise*", which means dipping consecutive wads of *foufou*[8] with your right hand into whatever else is on your plate and stuffing them into your mouth. This left Mikey and me to order steak and *frites* from the European menu, which were quite edible – especially the *frites*, a legacy of the Belgian

[7] See: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkMsqips7ms
[8] See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fufu

colonizers. Our table was at the outer edge of the main open-air dining area, which happened to be full of some 50 or so local notables celebrating an *"échange de vœux"* which is traditional at the beginning of a new year.

There was an MC accompanied by a large mobile bank of bright stage lights, which his assistant wheeled from table to table as the MC announced into his microphone, "*et ici nous avons* … ", introducing everyone to enthusiastic applause, including a couple of *chefs coûtumiers* in full costume. The MC got to his final table, and was about to go back to the rostrum, when I called out to him to come and introduce us as well. I prompted him to introduce Mikey as a young Canadian politician and future prime minister of Canada, and myself as his assistant. This occasioned great applause, and we were soon surrounded by mayors, *chefs coûtumiers* and assorted men-on-the-make who wanted to have their pictures taken with us. We were then invited to join in a form of Congolese line dance and group sing, all great fun.

On Tuesday morning we finally squeezed into a five-seater enclosed Jeep with a driver, while Jean Kamba and Tutulosa accompanied us on separate *motos,* and we set off for the country of the Kamwanga. Apart from an initial brief stretch of reasonably good dirt road built recently by my American friend in Kinshasa Cameron Burn, thanks to a grant from the European Union or the World Bank, the road or path ranged from awful to terrible to almost non-existent. At times we were barreling blindly through dense elephant grass that overhung both sides of the track and obscured everything, like a major blizzard. Somehow we finished the four-hour journey alive but sore, having only once become stuck going uphill in washed-out sand, requiring the passengers to disembark while the three Congolese riding behind in the box pushed and pulled the Jeep out of its hole and up the hill. Mostly we were on a very narrow winding dirt path; luckily there was virtually no other traffic except the occasional *moto.*

But the trip was not without its Congolese incidents, which Papa Ntumba, who has seen everything, blandly refers to as "*d*es imprévus". About one hour out of Tshikapa, we came to our first road-block. A few sullen men in imaginative uniforms asked to see our papers. Inexplicably, our Congolese host Jean Kamba Kabula had omitted to tell Mikey and me that we would need to show our passports in the middle of nowhere, so we had no papers to show, having left them back at the hotel in Tshikapa. Not to worry: Jean jumped on his *moto* and set off back to the hotel to retrieve our passports, while we were detained quite courteously in the compound of the local government representative for about an hour. He even offered us chairs to sit on amongst the chickens and small children. Since *motos* can navigate the local roads about twice as fast as four-wheeled vehicles, Jean was back in good time and we were soon allowed to proceed – until the next road-block. This time our driver had to pay a small bribe to get by (perhaps $10), and the same free-lance extortion happened at least twice more before we reached our destination. While these are equal-opportunity extortionists, targeting blacks as well as whites, it is best for whites to keep a low profile and let the Congolese do the negotiating.

VISIT TO SOMILO'S "HEADQUARTERS" IN MOTUMBO

The original plan had been for us to spend Tuesday morning and midday visiting SOMILO's Kamwanga site, returning to Tshikapa in time to catch a 3 p.m. flight to Kamako to visit the BKZ operations. (SOMILO is the *Société Minière de Longatshimo.*) But it soon became apparent that a combination of the relaxed African sense of time and our several *imprévus* had knocked this ambitious schedule into a cocked hat. The result was that we didn't have quite the time we should have had for either site visit, but we nevertheless saw and learned a great deal.

Our destination for the Jeep part of this first journey was the west bank of the Lumbembe River at its confluence with the Kasai. The Lubembe is roughly parallel to both the Tshikapa and the Longatshimo, all of them rising in Angola, flowing almost due north, and emptying into the Kasai. The Lubembe is much more placid than the Tshikapa. *Chef coûtumier* Simon Kamwanga apparently has a house on an island directly at the mouth of the Lubembe, but his brother Tutulosa informed us that he preferred to receive us at another house in his ancestral village of Motumbo.

So we transferred to a large pirogue with a 15 HP Yamaha outboard, were seated on opposite rows of blue plastic chairs facing inwards, and were expertly piloted all around the island over reaches of both the Lubembe and the Kasai, sometimes with the current and sometimes against it, with the boatman judging his landings perfectly. He disembarked us at a different spot on the mainland, and then it was back onto more *motos* for about a thirty-minute ride to Motumbo, passing through several other villages along the bumpy route.

Chef Simon (age 40) is an impressive man, far less excitable than his elder brother Tutulosa (age 46). He was installed as *chef coûtumier i*n 2003, having been chosen by his father as the most competent of his generation. When I congratulated him on his upcoming tenth anniversary, he said it will happen "*si Dieu le veut*". As *chef coûtumier* he is like a feudal lord, exacting non-monetary tribute from his subjects in exchange for providing rudimentary justice and protection. He in effect owns everything and runs everything in his domain. Much like former Congolese president Joseph Kabila on his much larger scale, chef Simon has personally profited greatly from his high position. Not long after becoming chef, he virtually expropriated a diamond dig somewhere nearby and lucked into a significant "*gisement*", so he is now a millionaire. But as Papa Ntumba remarked to me, he shares nothing with his many brothers or anyone else, so they are all envious. He has built himself the finest house in the village (in fact the only house, as all the others are huts or lean-tos), and he has the only TV set, which he leaves on continuously as evidence of his wealth. It is powered by his very own diesel-powered "*groupe électrogène*", a great status symbol. Since *chefs coûtumiers* are held in great reverence, he need not fear an uprising.

Chef Simon met us in front of his small ranch-style house, and invited us inside for some "*palabres africains*". Cokes were served, and in due course he ordered one of his sixteen wives to produce a quite elaborate Congolese meal, including wine and liquor. The conversation was cordial, with chef Simon doing much more listening than talking, unlike his brother Tutulosa. I expressed my interest in seeing some actual mining activity, but was told that there was nothing

nearby. As for SOMILO's river dredge, we were told it had been struck by a tree-trunk floating downstream that parted its moorings; the safety cable had held, but the dredge was still out of commission.

What SOMILO wants from foreigners is what everyone here wants, namely money. Chef Simon spends most everything he earns, and makes no attempt to accumulate capital for expansion. He has a vast concession under his PEPM (*permis d'exploitation de la petite mine*) 270, which was valid until March 2016. He has exploited only a tiny part of the concession, and has prospected very little more. His father, his predecessor in title of the PEPM, would not allow any outsiders onto the concession, so we would (they claimed) be the first foreigners ever to work there. There is no doubt that there are diamonds to be found in this region.

We became quite friendly, and chef Simon opened up a bit after the meal. He rather unexpectedly ended up exclaiming that if we came to some type of farm-out agreement (70 percent of the proceeds for us, 30 percent for him), he would sell us his idle river dredge at his cost so that we could get started immediately.

He would also sell us a new land-based gravel processor he had just bought, but that was sitting in storage in Tshikapa for lack of $4,300 or so in customs fees, plus the cost of transport to Motumbo.

If we did decide to proceed along these lines, our man on the spot would be Christian Mutoke, one of my associates in Tumupe Mining. I would get firm prices on the two pieces of equipment in the next few days.

Before we left, Tutulosa took me aside and led me to the scruffy playground outside the one-room school hut. He emphasized that what would make us really popular with the locals would be to dig a well and set up a public water pump in the middle of the village so that the women (never the men) wouldn't have to walk several kilometres to the nearest stream to fetch water.

We retraced our steps back to Tshikapa – *motos*, *pirogue*, Jeep – an exhausting trek, of which the final leg took six very uncomfortable hours. We didn't start the Jeep road trip until 8 p.m., well after dark.

For the ultimate insult, when we finally reached Tshikapa at 2 a.m. the main bridge across the river was blocked by some more police engaged in their felonious nocturnal employment. This was too much even for Papa Ntumba, who swore he would lay a formal complaint against them the next day (he didn't, of course – it would have taken him hours of time and accomplished nothing). Then he paid up.

On Wednesday morning I met the owner of the Hôtel Paradis, a charming grizzled Israeli named Ilan Affuta, around 65. Like others of his type here, he has a Canadian residence, in Dollard-des-Ormeaux. (I looked him up on Canada 411: Ilan Affuta, 7 Rue Malta,

Dollard-des-Ormeaux, Quebec.) But he said the only Canadian he actually knew was Stephen Harper! He had been in and out of the diamond business in Israel, and his son Eyale (age 42) is in diamonds in Luanda, Angola. He mentioned that a Canadian called Joseph sometimes stays in his hotel (guess who!). Eyale's wife lived in California with their two children: Mr. Affuta explained that the Jews have always been a nomadic race.

SITE VISIT TO BKZ HQ IN KAMAKO AND OPERATIONS NEAR VILLAGES OF LUBAMI, MANGA, AND KATOPA

Around noon on Wednesday we were informed that our plane to Kamako was now approaching the Tshikapa airstrip. We climbed onto our several *motos* and bumped along to meet it.

Flying very low over the huts and brush appeared an ancient Antonov An-2T single-engine biplane – a legendary aircraft designed in Russia in 1946, which for many years held the *Guinness Book of Records* title as having had the most years of continuous production of any aircraft in history – 1947 to 2001.

The An-2T has a brilliant design. To quote its Wikipedia article,[9] "Antonov designed a large single bay biplane of all-metal construction, with an enclosed cockpit and a cabin with room for seats accommodating twelve passengers". He thought of everything. "The An-2T is used as a light utility transport, parachute-drop aircraft, with agricultural work and many other tasks suited to this large slow-flying biplane. Its slow flight and good field performance make it suited for short, unimproved fields, and some specialized variants have also been built for cold weather and other extreme environments." They say if it crashes you just open the door and walk away.

Our version had a permanently-fixed vertical three-rung metal ladder outside, for climbing into the passenger bay. We found the front of the bay crammed to the roof with all kinds of cargo, held in place by a system of ropes, such that only four of the normal twelve inward-facing seats were available. The configuration is like the set-up for paratroops intending to jump. The seats are just square metal trays on foldable legs so they can be retracted to make room for more cargo. No upholstery, no backrest except the metal fuselage, no ventilation except a single small rotary peephole towards the rear of the cabin.

Since we were now five (Tutulosa having stayed in Tshikapa), Mikey was told to take the co-pilot's seat. As normal access to the cockpit via the cabin was completely blocked by cargo, he was shown three embedded toeholds on the outside of the fuselage that allowed him to clamber up onto the roof of the cabin, whence he walked forward to an opening in the cockpit roof designed for this very purpose, and lowered himself into his seat. He later told us the pilot was Russian; since neither of them spoke much English, there was little conversation.

A neophyte like me struggled to make the brittle old seat belt work; the others didn't bother. As soon as we were all seated, the single long-serving male cabin attendant pulled the door shut with a clang; the aircraft was already moving. The old attendant casually opened another door

[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonov_An2

leading into the tail section, pulled out a battered old plastic chair, and nonchalantly sat down as if he were in his living room, after hanging his broad-brimmed hat on a convenient peg.

We flew south non-stop for about an hour, very low, occasionally seeing the Longatshimo River to our left. The countryside is largely featureless, with low hills and a smattering of small villages. Surprisingly to me, no lakes at all – just the occasional stream flowing towards the Longatshimo.

In due course we landed smoothly at Kamako. The passengers climbed out, the cargo was quickly unloaded into waiting arms, new cargo taken on plus one or two passengers, and off she went to the next stop on her permanent rotation among four or five local villages.

Here Jean Kamba was clearly in his element. A retinue of *motos* was waiting for us, and we rode the short distance from the rudimentary airstrip into the village. We were deposited outside a somewhat noticeable one-storey building on the main street, which turned out to be the BKZ Hotel, from the initials of its owner -- see below. The hotel has eight rooms, each with a huge bed and one chair. It has electricity, but no running water. At the end of the corridor is what you might call an ablutions room with three stalls (two toilets and one urinal), and a tiny wash-basin and two shower stalls. After use you take a pitcher of water from a large central barrel and dump it into the plumbing in question. For a shower you dump the water on yourself.

After a suitable interval we were ushered next door, into the house of the great man himself, Bakwafika Kabula Zorro. He is a large man who exudes quiet authority. He received our little delegation in his small living room, and offered us *"sucrées*" (soft drinks). Apparently he is not from Kamako; he started out in another town very young as a *"cambiste"* (money-changer), and gradually diversified into other businesses, including commodities, and eventually diamonds. He began operating in the Longatshimo area in 2001, acquiring his current PEPM 677 in 2002.

After some pleasantries, we were invited to go outside to the waiting squad of *motos*. Zorro went to change into his travelling clothes, and reappeared with his wife Doublée who astonishingly was sporting white dress shoes for this trip into the bush (I was wearing my loafers and ordinary socks, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, topped off with sunglasses and my Tilley hat).

We set off on a westerly high-speed royal progress towards the Longatshimo, one *moto* and driver per passenger -- Papa Ntumba calls it motocross. There is a rough order of protocol, with Zorro in the lead, Doublée usually second, me third, etc., but occasionally the drivers take delight in passing one another if the track is wide enough – although never of course Zorro himself. Naturally the farther back you are in the pack, the more dust you have to eat. Luckily the route was dry, the only real perils being occasional soft sandy bits, which the drivers skilfully negotiate by swerving right and left, using their feet to push us through as an aid to the engine.

Fairly soon we stopped at a non-descript village (actually Lubami), which turned out to have a police post. I assumed it was at or near the border of Zorro's concession. We gathered round

the police hut, and the single well-rehearsed policeman came out with his gun, stood at attention in front of Zorro, and declaimed in a loud parade-square voice that the such-and-such detachment of the national police of the Democratic Republic of the Congo was greatly honoured to welcome Monsieur Zorro and his official delegation of visitors. Zorro responded with a perfunctory quiet "*merci*", as befits a great lord.

After streaking through several more small villages – chicks and ducks and geese better scurry, and they sure did, and goats too, and women with burdens on their heads, and small children – we eventually came to a small stream about twenty feet across, where we again stopped and dismounted. A sizeable number of women and children were washing clothes and bathing. We were swiftly surrounded by hordes of young children shouting "*mundele"* (in Lingala) or "*mutoke"* (in Tshiluba), meaning WHITE MAN! Many of them were so young they had never seen one before, and God knows what they had been told. They were all delighted to pose for pictures surrounding Mikey, grinning and gesticulating. A typical rural African scene, straight out of National Geographic.

By this time I thought I had experienced all conceivable means of locomotion, but no. To cross the stream we each jumped on the back of a strong young porter, who waded across up to his thighs to the opposite shore. In Mikey's case, the porter just picked him up like a child in both arms. Other porters picked up the *motos* and carried them across. I later learned that there is a standard fee for this service, I think well under a dollar per crossing.

So off we went again, and about two hours after leaving Kamako (say 50 km, given the stops and the condition of the track), we were finally at the right or east bank of the fabled Longatshimo River.

Once again we boarded a large *pirogue* with the regulation plastic chairs and 15 HP Yamaha engine. We motored southward upstream towards Angola on the very navigable river, with only a few very small rapids along this stretch that caused no trouble. After about 15 minutes, during which time we had untouched sections of PEPM 677 on both sides of us, we came to our first actual dredging works. It was land-based.

We disembarked and walked a few yards to inspect a large open pit, about 15 feet deep, in which seven men were working. Two of them were each directing a very powerful stream of water from a very large nozzle held tight between their thighs (very phallic). They had to lean forward hard against the pressure, generated by a large diesel pump drawing water from the nearby river. The high-pressure streams were being used to cut up the packed clay or soil at the bottom of the pit, like a hot poker through butter, turning it into a slurry of gravel. The resulting slurry was aspirated into another large hose operated by some more men, powered by a second large pump, and was then piped to a nearby enclosed gravel screening unit or "*tamiseur*". The men worked steadily and effectively under the supervision of Zorro's general manager. We were not offered an opportunity to inspect the *tamiseur*, for security reasons, but we could see it operating.

This whole complex is referred to by BKZ as a "*drague robot*", which it clearly is not, but it is a continuous process that can be kept going indefinitely. The most failure-prone component is the pressure hoses, which have been known to rupture, so they keep spare hoses on hand. The men usually work from eight a.m. to noon, take a one-hour lunch break, and work again until 5 p.m. But there is the option of carrying on all night under lights. There is also a slight risk of the pit wall collapsing if the mining operation is done improperly. Three of the men were wearing hard hats, the rest not.

After watching the extraction process for about 15 minutes we were led on foot to another part of the concession nearby, where a rough open shelter was large enough for all of us to sit in the shade. More *sucrées* were offered, and then a blue plastic card-table was assembled and placed in front of Zorro. A crowd of artisanal diggers gathered round. They had been using picks and shovels to work several small pits scattered about the landscape, and they wanted to witness the ceremony of the boss collecting and valuing the diamonds that each of them had found during the past two weeks. Each digger had put his few diamonds into a little paper "*colis"* with his name and the date of discovery written on it in ballpoint.

Zorro set to work with his *loupe* and his balance, and gave his judgment on each stone (uncontested), while a lieutenant kept careful notes. He asked us not to photograph this process, for fear of the taxman more than anything else. The process took him a good two hours, and he emphasized that what he was seeing was only the results of two weeks of *"prospection*", not actual intensive extraction.

So while Zorro carried on with his valuation, with Doublée seated right beside him watching intently the whole time (no doubt thinking this is where her white dress shoes come from), we were taken back into the *pirogue* and further upstream to a moored barged set up for a standard river dredging operation. Although the dredge was not operating, one of its diving teams and their minders were on hand to explain everything.

Finding good and willing young workers is not a problem here. The one thing that the Congo and much of Africa produces, "*en quantités industrielles*", is swarms of children. Many of them are bright, although most have little education, and they are all fit unless ill or badly fed, of which we saw no signs.

A second general comment concerns security. I suspect untypically, Zorro has arranged things so that he is absolute lord and master of everything dead or alive within his 30 square kilometre concession. More than a fiefdom, it is virtually a separate kingdom into which no-one can enter without his permission, and no-one can leave without being searched. He employs several armed guards, and scads of unarmed "*supportifs*" with Motorola walkie-talkies who can quickly summon backup if needed. The few locally-based national or provincial policemen in effect work for Zorro, not their governments. This has many advantages, not least that he can conduct all his activities away from prying eyes, and when he rides back to Kamako with his escort brigade nobody dares touch him. All of this is somewhat expensive (Jean Kamba mentioned that Zorro shells out $35,000 a month for all his many employees), but it is effective.

Once again we retraced our steps east for the return journey. From the time we boarded our motos at the *pirogue* beach until we arrived back at the hotel, including the river crossing our trip took exactly 90 minutes, most of it in complete darkness. Although somewhat hair-raising, I preferred it to the Jeep. Doublée and her assistants (perhaps Zorro's other wives) produced another fine Congolese dinner, and Jean Kamba produced a bottle of excellent Spanish red wine as an *apéritif.* After delicately asking whether it would be OK to discuss business during dinner and being told yes, I led the group through various possible forms of association among us. We came down in favour of a form of joint venture to work together on some of the as yet untouched areas of Zorro's concession. I volunteered to draft a barebones form of agreement in principle, and I sent the draft to all parties.

Our return journey to Kinshasa was fairly uneventful. The Antonov turned up in Kamako around 2 p.m. Thursday. There was less cargo and more passengers, one of whom had a large and unwieldy suitcase that our friend the cabin attendant flung loosely on top of the cargo. We all eyed it warily, expecting it to come cascading down on us during take-off. But anticipating this possibility, the attendant simply walked forward and leaned hard against it until we were fully airborne. For landing, of course, no problem, as it would jam itself against the forward bulkhead and not against us.

We made a brief stop at Kamonia, which is growing fast to rival Tshikapa as a diamond centre, and then on to Tshikapa itself. There we waited an hour or so for the Fokker 50, which this time didn't fly us to Kananga, but rather straight back to Kinshasa, in rather reduced style as compared to our outbound flight on the grand Airbus 320. Christian Mutoke's driver met us at Ndjili airport and drove us home. Papa Ntumba later told me that the driver was in fact another of his sons, but from a different "*lit"*.

A personal closing comment about the rigours of travel in rural Congo. While I would have no qualms about making occasional future trips to Kamako and even to the Longatshimo concession, I do not look forward to another five-hour Jeep ride (or three hours by moto) from Tshikapa to the banks of the Lubembe. Impassible rapids on the Kasai River both upstream and downstream from the confluence prevent access to the Lubembe by water. The best option would be to charter a small float plane in Tshikapa (if one is to be had), which could touch down easily on the Lubembe River. Although this would attract unwanted attention, if used sparingly and with a good cover story it might well be feasible.

I have never followed up on this possibility.

Trips To Kinshasa (2012-2014)

Peter White's trips to Kinshasa, 2012-2014

July 23 to August 7, 2012	15 days
(one night in Brussels to visit Antwerp's diamond centre; I also visited Brazzaville for two nights)	
October 3 to 24, 2012 – opened Trust Merchant Bank bank account	21 days
December 28, 2012 to February 7, 2013 -- wrote three reports in January	41 days
March 27 to April 11, 2013	15 days
May 6 to 20, 2013	14 days
July 30 to August 12, 2013	13 days
October 10 to 24, 2013	14 days
December 30, 2013 to January 16, 2014	18 days
May 11-19, 2014	6 days
October 5-12, 2014	157 days